

Texas House General Investigating Committee
Hearing Regarding The Influx Of Immigrants At The Texas Border
Testimony of Congressman Michael C. Burgess, M.D. (TX-26)
April 20, 2021

Chairman Krause and Members of the Texas House General Investigating Committee, thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony on the ongoing crisis on our southern border and its impact on North Texas. You have asked that Members of Congress address several questions related to the crisis.

1. How is the border crisis impacting your district?
2. What could your district be doing if it was not having to respond to immigrant surges?
3. What is the biggest challenge for your district related to the current border crisis?

I represent the 26th District of Texas, comprised of Denton County and parts of Tarrant County. As a North Texas district, we are not experiencing the strain of those communities directly on the border; however, Unaccompanied Children (UCs) are being sent to shelters all over the country, including the Kay Bailey Hutchison Convention Center Dallas, which I recently visited. The Office of Refugee Resettlement (ORR) at the Department of Health and Human Services, which is responsible for the care of UCs, is requesting volunteers to help at the shelters. Our country is still recovering from the Coronavirus pandemic. No child should suffer, but many clinics and vaccination sites are also in need of volunteers to help get every eligible American vaccinated. The vaccination site at the Texas Motor Speedway has logged a significant number of volunteer hours and is desperate for more volunteers to help administer vaccines. In a single day, the Texas Motor Speedway administered nearly 15,000 vaccines. All volunteer efforts should be focused on defeating this COVID-19 pandemic, not taking care of another country's children. In addition, while large-scale events are not yet taking place, smaller events and gatherings are occurring. Places like the Dallas Convention Center could be hosting activities to help our North Texas economy recover.

Another impact on the citizens of Texas is the financial toll caused by this crisis. Texas has spent millions of dollars protecting its border with Mexico, a responsibility that should fall to the federal government. During the last surge in 2019, I authored an amendment to provide \$800 million to Texas for the cost of securing the border but it did not receive a floor vote. This crisis is costing Texas taxpayers their hard-earned money twice over because Texas is having to respond in place of the federal government. Taxpayer revenue could be redirected to continue supporting infrastructure improvements in the 26th district and to support businesses that have struggled throughout this pandemic.

During the month of February, record numbers of UCs were referred to ORR. These numbers were the highest they have been in 15 years. Customs and Border Protection encountered over 172,000 individuals along our southern border attempting to cross without authorization. Most of them were single adults. These individuals are coming here to make money that they send out of this country in the form of remittances. Governor Abbott has taken the important step of opening Texas back up. The flood of

unauthorized immigrants streaming into Texas will take jobs away from Texans at a time when many remain unemployed.

Additionally, absorbing large numbers of immigrants into our communities may present some challenges for those in the 26th district. Schools may not have the capacity to accept a large number of new immigrants, many of whom do not yet speak English. While children are given an initial health screening in ORR custody, many do not have the regular vaccinations or health records typically required for school entry. Another public health concern is the availability of vaccines. There are no restrictions on who can receive a COVID-19 vaccine. If a large number of immigrants are released into our North Texas communities, as well as across the country, they will limit the number of vaccines available to Americans. Stopping the pandemic will require herd immunity, but Americans should not come second to those who broke our laws and are here without authorization.

Without this border crisis straining our state and federal resources, the residents of the 26th District of Texas could focus on recovering from this pandemic, and their tax dollars could go toward supporting priorities for Texans rather than responding to the needs of unauthorized migrants.

4. Has this border crisis differed from previous surges?

Yes. Smugglers, traffickers, foreign banks, and cartels have always profited from enticing hopeless people into sending their children or themselves to make a dangerous journey to unlawfully cross our southern border. These bad actors know how to manipulate our laws to their advantage. They pay attention to the words that are spoken in Washington, D.C.

The Biden Administration has hung an OPEN sign on the southern border. Secretary of Homeland Security Mayorkas essentially said to those from Mexico and Central America that they can come to the United States, but just don't come now. When President Biden took office, he immediately reversed several immigration policies that were in place under President Trump. Namely, he halted the Migrant Protection Protocols, also known as the "Remain in Mexico" policy. He undid a change to asylum applications that required those seeking asylum to present themselves at a port of entry. He changed the eligibility for expedited removal proceedings, making it so that 80% of the removal population could not be deported on an expedited basis. He terminated Asylum Cooperative Agreements the United States had with El Salvador, Guatemala, and Honduras that required asylum-seekers to apply at home before making the dangerous journey to our southern border. And most egregious, he halted construction of the southern border wall that was authorized and funded by Congress. These are only a few of the many actions taken by President Biden in his first days in office. To my knowledge, there has never been such a significant reversal in federal policy by an incoming President that resulted in a direct and immediate crisis. This is not a cyclical uptick, as the Biden Administration claims. This is an influx as a direct result of policy choices made by the Biden Administration.

It is not inhumane to enforce our laws. Putting forward policies that allow children to be used as pawns is inhumane. Trekking a child across multiple countries just to smuggle them illegally into another country is inhumane.

Let me repeat myself - our laws are not inhumane. Their non-enforcement is leading to inhumane actions by desperate people. We need to help them at home, not here where the taxpayer is on the hook.

For anyone who turns on the news, you can see the terrible and disheartening situation at the border. So, TODAY, I ask: Why would anyone object to enforcement of our laws?

5. Has the federal government helped your district in responding to this border crisis?

No.

Thank you, and I welcome any follow-up.

A handwritten signature in blue ink, reading "Michael C. Burgess".

Michael C. Burgess, M.D.
Member of Congress